

OLFA interview with Marek Vich

J: Hello, I'm Jana Kyriakou, I'm greeting you from Prague, Czech Republic, the heart of Europe. I'm here today with my friend and colleague Marek Vich. Hello, Marek.

M: Hello

J: We are talking today about self-compassion, kindness towards ourselves. About the relationship that we have towards ourselves. And that when we are kind to ourselves, it mirrors outwardly. It affects the way we see ourselves in comparison with others or how we behave towards others.

Marek, you are a promoter of self-compassion. And you are also a promoter and teacher of mindfulness. How are mindfulness and self-compassion related ?

M: They are really two connected things. Self-compassion means to be your own best or at least good friend. Circumstances aside, whether my life is going well or not. And mindfulness is a skill to notice what's happening in the present moment with full awareness. So I can give you an example how these two elements are connected.

I get into a very common life situation, like I fail an exam, or a project at work, or my partner breaks up with me. If self-compassion is missing, which is a common pattern for us based on habits of many generations before us, so I either start feeling pity for myself - pure me, what did life throw into my path again. So it paralyzes me. Or I start lynching myself, criticize myself. Like you didn't make it because you didn't study enough or the project didn't work out, because you are lazy, etc, etc. So in this moment I can use mindfulness and notice that all of this is happening: Aha, I made a mistake and I feel sad or I feel angry or scared...And I'm reacting by feeling pity or by criticizing myself. So I notice all this and I actually name it as interesting, as an interesting soap-opera unwinding here ...in different words, it's difficult if something bad happens to us, but the story we can create about it in our head, might feel even worse. So when I notice it and label it as interesting, I make it a little lighter. And for many people, that's enough. They suddenly don't see it as so terrible any more, they can learn from it and continue with their life.

But sometimes, when the situation is really hard and it hurts a lot, we need to offer ourselves kind self-care. Who takes care of us the best ? Our best friend, not the friend from outside, but us. We ourselves need to give ourselves the support we need instead of throwing sticks under our feet. And that's the self-compassion. For example I can gently stroke myself and say: it's OK, things happen, but I love you and I'm with you. Or I buy myself an ice-cream and tell myself: congratulations to another life experience, enjoy the chocolate ice-cream, I love you. The actual touch is very important. Often when we only tell the nice words to ourselves, it's not enough. But when I really stroke myself and say I love you, it really works. But for all this to work, I first need to notice. And that's the mindfulness.

J: That's beautiful

M: In a nutshell :)

J: And what happens when we keep looking for the care and kindness and love and appreciation outside ourselves, when we want the others to keep telling us how beautiful or successful we are? Instead of offering all that to ourselves by ourselves? What trap are we getting into ?

M: I understand where you are going. We are falling into a trap of being dependent. Being dependent on other people. And that we don't have our circumstances under control. Yes, something bad happens, someone leaves you, that great amazing guy, he is suddenly gone. He left you for a younger women or older one, I don't know. Of course our world falls apart. But if we keep finding solutions in a hope that another price will come or someone else will solve our problem, then we are in that trap. Life gives us these lessons so that we can better understand ourselves, so that we become more whole. And we can become whole in a moment when we start loving ourselves.

J: Hmm, but that's difficult

M: Yes, of course, it is difficult. But life is like a school and every one of us is studying the subjects we sign up for. Key thing, when a circumstance comes to our life , is not to behave like a victim. Because a victim always expects that someone from the outside will save her, always. Partner, prince on a white horse, politician, parents, children. I'm not going to pretend I'm super mature...I have my load too, sometimes I handle it and sometimes not. But the good thing is that at least I know one thing in my head, if not in my feelings where the mess usually is.... I know I will not handle the circumstance as a victim. Something happens to me, life gives me a lesson and an opportunity to stand up on my feet, to love myself more, and when I keep waiting for something external to save me, I won't stand up on my own feet. So I will keep getting the life lessons until I do. And to stand up on my feet I need to activate that nurturing, loving quality within myself, we can say that mother care quality. I need to activate it to heal myself and to give myself strength. So that I can handle the situation. It might sound strange, but I need to become my own prince on the white horse.

J: And you founded a great organisation in Czech Republic. You founded Mindfulness Club, which offers support to people. A support to explore and cultivate the mindfulness and self-compassion. And learn how to be kind to yourself. What's the mission of the Czech Mindfulness Club?

M: Mindfulness Club is located right around the corner from here, from Letna park in Prague. And it's mission is to offer easy access and information about mindfulness to people. So we organise a lot of various events. We organize events for free, where you can come every week and taste and try various approaches and teachers. We also organize more intensive events like 8 week courses. And all this with a goal to provide people with a scale of ways to practice mindfulness and self-compassion in their lives. Another very important goal is to connect people

that are interested in mindfulness and that pass the skills further, teachers like you and me and many more. So we are building a community and space where we can grow.

J: So I see that it's important that we have the skill to take care of ourselves by ourselves and give ourselves the love and kindness. And on the other hand it's also important to have a community where people can support and inspire each other. So that's what Mindfulness Club offers

M: Yes, exactly. It's our bigger goal. We want to organize more community events where people can meet. For example we organize conferences. Anyway, completely non-commercially I would like to state that the base of building community is that you find someone in your life. Not someone who is super mindful or a master of mindfulness. I'm certainly not. I rather know how to explain it well and I practice it for a while. But it's about finding someone who is willing to step away from the role of the victim and is willing to learn from all the situations. Who is willing to transform the pain into the self-compassion. Transform the pain into the growth. So if you have someone in your life, it's good to meet them, talk about it, exchange experiences. And if you don't have anyone like that, you can come to us, to our events.

J: Marek, thank you very much. If you have the opportunity, check the website: www.mindfulnessclub.cz. You can have a look at my website: www.bewellinstitute.com or find us on Facebook - Mindfulness Club or Jana Kyriakou. I also organize workshops mainly for women about kindness to the body under the organisation Embody Love Movement, www.embodylovemovement.org. Organisation that also does a great work supporting us to love ourselves more and enjoy our life more.
Thank you, be well!